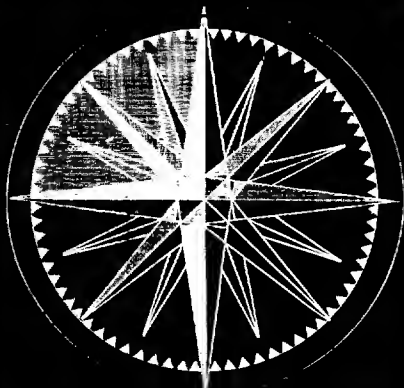


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# SPECIAL REPORT

ROLE OF COMMUNIST PARTY IN SOVIET STATE UNDER CRITICAL REVIEW

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
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## ROLE OF COMMUNIST PARTY IN SOVIET STATE UNDER CRITICAL REVIEW

Recently there have been increasing signs of an extraordinary mood of introspection within the Soviet Communist Party, evinced in public debate on questions as basic as that of the proper role of the party in Soviet society. As in the vexatious matter of economic reform, it is not yet clear what views individual Soviet leaders support in this essentially political exchange, and indeed it is questionable whether there is among the present leaders any one with sufficient stature to give a definitive answer to the issues being raised. The discussion in the press is being conducted largely by lower level party officials and intellectuals. There is evidence, however, that some of the issues are becoming subjects of controversy in the Kremlin and may be factors in a struggle for power. The current and growing debate is thus much more than an exercise in theoretical discourse. It is the visible evidence of concrete and possibly far-reaching choices confronting the Soviet leadership.

### Principal Issues

Underlying the discussions is the consciousness of the now acknowledged fallibility of past party leaders, first of Stalin, whose publicly discussed mistakes date back to 1917, and more recently of Khrushchev. Also implicit is a growing awareness of the increasing complexity of the Soviet economy, in which specialized knowledge is far more effective than good intentions, no matter how highly motivated by Marxist-Leninist fervor.

Complicating these discussions is the impact of a rising generation on whom the party must depend for its future existence but which is generally better educated than, and whose outlook is different from, that of its elders.

One of the main issues in the current debate is that of the proper work of party organizations and the need for differentiation between party and state functions. Lower level party officials are divided on whether their work should be primarily "political"--teaching Marxism-Leninism, controlling personnel appointments and checking plan fulfillment--or "economic"--involving them in the day-to-day managerial decisions of a farm or factory in a concrete effort to improve production. If the party organizations' activity is deemed to be only "political," differentiation between party and state functions could be fairly easily arranged, but the managerial decisions affecting the rise or fall of production would be made by state, not party organs. This would sharply limit the party's control of the economic process.

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If, however, the choice is "economic," "duplication of" or "substitution for," state organs making decisions in exactly the same area cannot be avoided.

Moreover, if it is accepted that a party official should concern himself intimately with problems requiring increasingly specialized expertise, he must then be equipped with the required knowledge. The issue of the proper content of party work and the separation of party and state functions has thus focused primarily on the party's relationship to experts in economic, industrial, and agricultural fields.

The Scientists' Views

A further issue is emerging, however, as political scientists and sociologists also bid for status as "experts." Most of these social scientists appear to conceive of their roles as properly independent of traditional party doctrine. The party, in their view, would provide guidance in the selection of problems for investigation and utilize the results of research, as it now does with respect to the physical scientists.

There have also been suggestions, however, that the party apparatus itself undertake research in the social field. This raises the possibility of still other choices--whether the content of party work should be "political," or "economic," or embrace sociological research. The last-named option may prove congenial to

some proponents of the "political" content view, but it would have far-reaching implications for Marxist-Leninist doctrine. The ideology, in essence, would be subjected to continued questioning, re-examination, and alteration, not by the political leaders as in the past but by "sociological experts."

Friction Between Generations

An organization in which recruitment and promotion standards were based primarily on technical expertise rather than on political loyalty would be quite different from the Communist Party as it long existed in the Soviet Union. The trend during the Khrushchev era was toward selection on the basis of technical knowledge. The press has recently provided evidence that this provided the basis for a conflict already evident in friction between older party officials and a production-oriented younger generation of recruits.

This conflict of generations has been heightened by an increase in party membership of over 60 percent in the past nine years, and there is evidence that this rapid growth has itself caused considerable emotional heat. Thus another problem raised in the debate about party work relates to the composition and nature of the party. Stated most broadly, the issue is whether the party should be a mass organization or a close-knit elite.

Friction between generations has also been apparent in public discussion of the so-called

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"renovation" clauses of the party statutes adopted in 1961. These clauses provided for systematic turnover of personnel in party posts by limiting the number of years or terms which an individual could serve consecutively. At the same time, eligibility requirements for election to office at the primary committee level were lowered. Judging from the complaints being voiced in the press, many inexperienced youngsters have displaced their elders in party posts at this level.

#### Internal Party Discipline

The fourth key issue in the present debate relates to the old problem of internal party discipline and the principle of democratic centralism. In mid-May, an article in Party Life, the journal of the central committee, attempted to deal with the issue of "justified" dissent, but its "solution" was no more convincing than previous attempts have been and gave no clear guidance to a younger generation bred on 12 years of successive "revelations" of "errors" on the part of party leaders who, when in power, were treated as infallible. The article did, however, conclude acidly that it is impossible to justify those Communists, especially the leaders, who enthusiastically implemented the obviously incorrect stereotyped "recommendations" in Khrushchev's antigrasslands campaign. Thus, the issue of individual conscience and responsibility was squarely put and the door to justified opposition to party policy opened wide.

An article, which seems intended as a retort, appeared in the same journal a month later. Ostensibly devoted to a recently published volume of Lenin's works, it focused strongly on the duty of every Communist, "even of a secretary of the central committee," to obey to the letter and without question, "all decisions of the central committee."

Pravda and Izvestia have differed on the matter of the proper content of party work. Pravda has leaned toward the traditional political, "inspirational" concept of the party role. It has also been hospitable to the idea of accepting political science and sociology as respectable "scientific" disciplines. Izvestia and Economic Gazette, on the other hand have favored emphasizing "economic" content, despite the fact that this would result in closer party involvement in state functions.

#### Some Top Leadership Views

Only Suslov, Mzhavanadze, and Shelest of the top leaders, and First Secretary Masherov of Belorussia, have commented publicly thus far on the issues in question. In early June, Suslov told the Bulgarians that "we" are interested in "a more precise separation of the functions of party and state organs." He seemed to lean in the direction of a "political" context for party work. Mzhavanadze's speech in late June to the Georgian central committee did not touch

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on party versus state functions, as such, but it clearly revealed his preference for an elite rather than a mass party, his hostility to the influx of youngsters with production expertise, his resentment of the "renovation" clauses, and his insistence on rigid party discipline. His explicit praise for Stalin's standards for admission to party membership made it unlikely that the speech passed unnoticed by the leadership in Moscow. Shelest, at a conference of Ukrainian officials in late June, stressed the "political" content of the work being accomplished by the Ukrainian party in increased attention to ideology, greater care in the selection of officials, and checking on plan fulfillment.

The new head of the Belorussian party organization, P. Masherov, came out strongly for "economic" content of party work in a long article on 11 August in Economic Gazette. Masherov's views probably reflect those of presidium member Mazurov with whom he had worked closely for a long time and whom he succeeded when Mazurov was promoted to full membership in

the presidium last March. Not only did Masherov make it plain that he considered economic knowledge essential for party officials, but he described with pride the courses established under Mazurov to ensure that party as well as state officials received this training. He promised to continue this effort.

On 11 August, a Pravda editorial commented on a recent sharp criticism by the central committee of Kharkov oblast--the region associated with Podgorny's rise in the Ukraine--for its party personnel policies. The oblast was charged with having emphasized numerical growth, allegedly to the detriment of "quality" in the new recruits, and of having been lax in supervising their indoctrination in Marxism-Leninism.

The disagreements over the direction of party activities have not yet reached crisis proportions, but as the forthcoming Party Congress and work on the new state constitution generate pressures for decision, the issues could easily stimulate and feed division and factional strife within the leadership.

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